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Progress in School Discipline.

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REMARKS

OF

DR. MORRILL WYMAN,

OF CAMBRIDGE,

IN SUPPORT OF

THE RESOLUTION TO ABOLISH THE CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF GIRLS IN
THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF THE CITY,

MADE

IN THE REPUBLICAN CAUCUS, NOVEMBER 26, 1866.



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CAMBRIDGE:

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1866.

1877
 1878
 1879

ADDRESS.

Resolved.—It is the opinion of this meeting that the corporal punishment of girls should be abolished in each and every public school in this city.

Dr. Wyman spoke as follows:

Mr. Chairman—Until last June I had not supposed any occasion would occur which would render it necessary to offer for the consideration of a public assembly of our citizens, a resolution like that which I have just read. More than twenty years ago, I knew that in the world-renowned schools of Prussia, protestant, victorious Prussia, which owes her victories more to the intellect of her Bismark than the efficiency of her needle-guns; in those schools, I say, not a blow had fallen upon the person of a girl for more than a quarter of a century. In Boston, in 1845, during the controversy between the Hon. Horace Mann, then Secretary of the Board of Education, and the "thirty-one Boston School Masters," in which school discipline was discussed, I do not recollect that the whipping of girls was ever mooted. Indeed that same year, while this famous controversy was in progress, the Hon. Theophilus Parsons, in a report of the Boston School Committee, says:—"We are ready to say of him who in this age and city avows that he cannot teach our girls without resort to blows, that he cannot so use the respect and docility and the affectionate temper which characterize the many, as to subdue the perversity of the few, is not yet fit for the high vocation of teacher."

The Boston school report for last year contains a report of a special Committee, appointed to examine into certain disagreeable rumors or irregularities in the discipline of some schools, and they express the opinion that in

regard to girls schools, corporal punishment should never be used, and find their justification in the very gratifying fact that "in two of the best girls schools in Boston, corporal punishment is not used nor allowed on any consideration." Our own school report for 1864 contains the following: "It is granted that whipping is altogether wrong as a discipline for girls;" the report is signed unanimously by the then School Committee, (three of the gentlemen comprising it being members of the present School Committee), and distributed to the inhabitants of the city that they might know the opinions of their Committee upon the points discussed. It was supposed, therefore, that the whipping of girls in the public schools of our city had ceased. And this was the state of things until last June, when that most deplorable case occurred which made us aware of the fact that a girl of sixteen years of age had been whipped, and that the whipping was in accordance with the rules for the government of our public schools. This case excited a good deal of surprise and indignation, and a petition was presented to the School Committee respectfully requesting that the corporal punishment of girls be abolished in each and every public school in the city, on the ground that such acts are brutalizing to the teacher, injurious to the pupil, and shocking to the community. This petition was signed by Rev. Dr. Walker, ex-president of Harvard College, Thomas Hill, President of Harvard College, Professor Longfellow, Professor Washburn, Professor Parker, and other scientific and literary gentlemen and citizens—more than three hundred in number.

Nothing was heard from this petition until four months after its presentation, when the Committee published an "Address to the People of Cambridge," and not only refused to abolish the rule, under which the whipping had taken place, but substantially reaffirmed it. By this rule, as it now stands, *any pupil, without distinction of age or sex, must be whipped whenever the principal shall so determine, whatever the force required to accomplish it.* Now the citizens have no power directly to modify this rule; the School Committee have by law exclusive control of this matter, but they can modify the Committee, and this it is proposed to do. Not that we have any complaints to make against the gentlemen composing the Committee; I war against the rule alone. These gentlemen enjoy in a high degree the confidence of the community; they are conscientious men, many of them my personal friends.

I trust that good men may be found who will supply their places. We must not jeopardize our cause by placing it in the hands of its opponents. Not wild radicals who will lay the axe to the root of this fair system of common schools which has been of so slow a growth and required so much wisdom to bring it to its present proportions, but judicious men who will lop off a worse than useless branch which not only interferes with but threatens to destroy it. Before advancing civilization the whipping post has disappeared from the streets; flogging is no longer allowed in the State Prison, the House of Correction, nor on ship-board; and why should it be continued for little girls?

The "Address to the People" would seem to be more properly a defence of the position assumed by the Committee, and also an argument for corporal punishment. I propose to examine some points so far as they apply to girls. This also is signed by the Committee unanimously, and among the names are those who, two years ago declared that "whipping of girls as a discipline is altogether wrong." It opens with an account of the case of Josephine Foster. I regret that the Committee did not see fit to furnish us a plain statement of facts, instead of their own views, opinions and inferences. We could be safely trusted to draw our own inferences, without their guidance. I am willing to take the case as I find it in the Address, notwithstanding its considerable variations from the facts as eli-

cited on the examination; and what are briefly these facts? A girl, not in good odor with her teacher, is detected in whispering; she is thought defiant, and is sent to the recitation room to be whipped; the teacher followed, almost immediately, with a rattan, intending to punish her, but found the pupil too old, or too strong, or both, and concluded to await the return of the principal, when it was arranged that the girl should be whipped by one of the female teachers, assisted by another. According to this programme, the whipping commenced; the screams were loud, and reached the adjoining room; the whipping was continued until the principal came into the room, when it was discontinued, and the principal took the place of one teacher and directed the other to whip till the girl ceased screaming, which was done, and the principal left the room. The two teachers were now left alone with the girl; she was told she had submitted to the principal and must now submit to them, and was whipped a third time. The Committee tell us "there was no trace of improper motive on the teacher's part." Will they tell me what *proper* motive could have actuated those teachers in that third whipping? I certainly know of none. These are the facts as given by the Committee themselves. Now I wish to ask what has been gained by this display of violence. Has the pupil been improved? has school discipline gained? have the teachers gained in reputation? has the fair fame of the city gained? has any interest been advanced except the interests of the private schools of the city? and these, if I am not greatly misinformed, have been very materially advanced.

The Committee say it is because parents do not abandon the rod at home that it is found so difficult to dispense with it at school; that the public schools embrace children of both native and foreign parentage from all the various classes of our society, and that "the persuasive influences of home discipline" are needed. Now, sir, if I am not very much mistaken it is one of the main objects of the common schools* to seek out those children who have suffered in their homes from neglect and the ill consequences of vicious parentage, who have never known what kindness and gentleness is, who have daily fallen under cruel blows from parental hands that should have been outstretched for their support and protection; to gather these unfortunate beings into a new

* I here but repeat the expressions of one of the best friends of the School.

fold, where it is the duty of the teacher to show, and the duty of the School Committee to aid him in showing by kindness and gentleness and sympathy that there is something besides stripes and blows in God's world, and not because she has not already felt the "persuasive influence of home discipline" to redouble the blows in severity and in number, until after three successive whippings she shall acknowledge "the abstract beauty of unconditional submission."

The Committee speak of the teacher as standing in *loco parentis* in the place of a parent. I apprehend that this expresses but a part of the relations between the teacher and pupil. He stands not merely in the place of a parent but in the place of a *wise* and *good* parent. The city of Cambridge does not pour out a hundred thousand dollars annually on her public schools that they may be supplied with teachers who take for their example the worst parents or even excell them, and become originals in this wretched competition. For where can you find in this community a man who lays any, even the slightest claim to the character of a good parent, who whips his daughter after she has arrived at the years of womanhood, three successive times for *any* offence. No, sir, we have a right to expect our teachers will bring to their work intelligence, fidelity and a sound judgment, united with kindness, sympathy and a calm temper, and these I am bound to say do not appear in those three teachers. The "Address" then passes in review the various kinds of punishment now in use in our public schools, and enumerates the objections to them, and I am ready to admit that the objections are well founded. One thing I must say, in passing, in the whole of these twenty-four pages I do not find a single allusion to *rewards* and *encouragements*, nor yet to that system of checks and credits by which, as it seems to me, the school accounts are so expeditiously settled. The Committee does not say that it proposes to sweep away all those other and less objectionable forms of correction and substitute corporal punishment, but this last is the only one defended or even mentioned with approbation. But if this is the plan of their new campaign and this the principal arm to be brought into use, the sooner we flank them the better. With regard to expulsion from school the Committee is more definite. They draw a lively picture of the effect of dismissal from school; the pupils will

seek it, they intimate that life and property will not be safe, the haunts of ignorance and crime will be recruited, the houses of correction filled, and our public schools decimated into the reformed schools.

Now all this is said within sound of the college bell. One third of all the classes which enter Harvard College disappears in one way or another before graduation; some for inattention, some for misdemeanors and insubordination, and some for much more serious offences than any ordinarily found in our public schools; and yet we do not learn that they ordinarily become thieves or murderers, or even necessarily get into the State prison, and if this is not true of those who assemble in Colleges, to assert it of young girls is simply absurd.

As to the right of the School Committee to suspend and dismiss children from the public schools there is no doubt. This is clearly stated in the opinion of Chief Justice Shaw, in the Charlestown case, some years ago. "Schools are established for the benefit of all the inhabitants. The enjoyment of this benefit, then, is a common and not an exclusive or personal right; then like other common rights, that of way, for instance, it must be exercised under such limitations and restrictions that it shall not interfere with equal and coextensive rights of others." The Committee seem to forget that good children have rights as well as naughty children; that they have a right to receive the benefit of the provisions made for their education, and if these naughty children interfere materially with the good conduct of the school, or if their repeated correction would so take up the time and attention of the teachers and pupils as to cripple its action, they should be removed, and provision made for them elsewhere, in a separate school perhaps, and under more favorable circumstances for their reform. There is no question in my mind as to our duty in this respect.

The last point in the address I propose to notice is that the Committee are of opinion that the abolition of flogging on shipboard has been followed by more cruel consequences, and they express their fears that the same cruel consequences may follow the abolition of flogging of little girls. I will give them the credit of consistency in these expressions, but whether the community partake in these fears I have very grave doubts. As to the last fear, it vanishes at once under the watchful care of a good and faithful School Committee, who

take care that those teachers who exhibit a tendency to cruelty or bad temper silently and speedily disappear from the schools.

Why should not girls be treated as boys? Because girls are not boys. Every parent having children of both sexes knows that they have moral characteristics which at once distinguish them before they have arrived at the school age. They are weaker in body and more sensitive in feeling, and are more occupied with the impression they make upon others long before they know its value. That delicate sense of propriety which distinguishes the woman has already its germs in the girl. They seem to know instinctively that they cannot rely upon physical strength and as instinctively cling to others for support and protection. They are gentle, docile, confiding and affectionate. They exhibit these gentler qualities at home and in school in a thousand ways; they hasten to meet their teacher as she approaches in the morning; they run by her side, they seize her hand, and evince their affection by kisses upon her cheeks and roses upon her desk. The skillful and faithful teacher takes advantage of these qualities, especially of their docility, and so moulds them that corporal punishment is not only unnecessary but it is cruelty.

Physiologically she is different, and to this I would most earnestly beg your attention. Her blood corpuscles are smaller, her nervous system is of a more delicate structure, her brain is lighter, and her muscles smaller; she is made for quickness and vivacity, but not for strength and endurance. The same reasons which prevent her from sharing the rougher games and plays of boys should protect her from suffering the harsher punishments of boys. She is more sensitive to internal emotions and external sensations; and I assert, without fear of contradiction, that no physician can be safely trusted to advise for the preservation of health or its restoration who disregards even in the child the distinction of sex. The most eventful period of her physiological life is spent in schools. During this period there is not unfrequently mental uneasiness, irritability and depression, easily mistaken for petulance and defiance by the unwise, and I greatly fear has sometimes produced punishment for that for which she is answerable to her God alone.

With a rapidity of development unknown in the other sex she becomes a woman

with all a woman's refined sensibilities, hopes and fears. She now instinctively knows that upon the good impression she makes upon others is based her hopes for the future. If her physical organization is sensitive, her spiritual nature is doubly sensitive, and it is this which makes her what she is. It is in vain to count the number and weigh the severity of the blows upon her person, and note the hours that elapse before their marks disappear. Her spirit is wounded, she is disgraced and degraded; years may not efface the consequences. It is this that stirs the sensibilities and brings down the censure of the greater part of the civilized world, and from none is that censure more severe than from cultivated women. Strike not a woman even with a feather, is the motto of civilization, and it is in accordance with the spirit of Christianity also.

But in consequence of her greater sensitiveness to external impressions, a blow of equal force produces a more serious effect; and this together with the fact that early womanhood is the period at which diseases of the brain and nervous system are most readily and most frequently developed, should lead us to beware lest the most serious consequences follow the violence done to mind and body by corporal punishment. I say this not without good reason. Within three months the city of Cambridge has paid a bill for the maintenance of a young woman at the Worcester Asylum who became first epileptic and then insane after, and as her physician believes, in consequence of a blow on the head with a ferule in the hands of one of our former female teachers. For the protection of teachers, then, it would be well to abolish corporal punishment of girls.

The Committee tell us that taking away the power of corporal punishment from one sex of pupils would "make a distinction of doubtful justice." If the two sexes were alike this would be true, but they are not; all physiology is against it, all common sense is against it; and the injustice of continuing a rule which makes no distinction of age or sex is most unmistakable. We do, therefore, most strenuously urge the abolition of the corporal punishment of girls, because the best public schools are successfully taught without it; because it is not permitted in private schools, and finally for reasons founded on the immutable laws of our Maker. He who declares that he cannot

control our girls without resort to blows, or cannot use the gentle qualities of the many to control the perversity of the very few, has not yet risen to the level of his calling. He has yet to learn that it is the soft falling rain, the sunshine, and the gentle dew, and not the crushing tornado, which bring forth the fruits which are fitted to nourish and develop.

But if there are still some who, from obstinacy or perversity, resist all those influences which the faithful and skillful teacher knows how to use, then let her be held as one diseased, and removed from those she is injuring, and be instructed elsewhere, until she gives evidence of that more healthy condition which will qualify her for again enjoying those advantages which the city so lavishly prepares

for her. I cannot doubt, sir, that when this question shall be submitted to our fellow citizens they will agree with me that this relic of barbarism, the corporal punishment of girls, must be banished from our schools. I trust that the day is not far distant, when instead of those dark words, Authority, Fear, Pain, we shall see written on the walls of our school rooms in letters of light those other words, Gentleness, Kindness, Love. But whatever be the result of this evening's deliberations, I shall be ever grateful that I have been allowed to raise my voice, with whatever of influence I possess, on the side of humanity, civilization, and the laws of God, as I see them developed in human beings.

